

Too many desks sat idle this week, as furloughs began for many federal civilian employees in the Department of Defense (DOD) due to the indiscriminate budget cuts known as sequestration. These DOD workers are truly dedicated patriots who are tasked by Congress with their duties. Their efforts to support our war fighters are vital to the mission of our overall national security, and these cuts continue to undermine the strength of our military's readiness. As Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee's Readiness Subcommittee and an American, this deeply concerns me, and I reminded my colleagues in a speech on the House floor of the personal and professional challenges our dedicated civilian workers face.

On Wednesday, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel issued a memo detailing the DOD's plan for reducing its budget by \$52 billion in fiscal year 2014, as mandated by sequestration. These budget reductions simply cannot happen. The impacts that they will have on our military's future capabilities are unacceptable. Secretary Hagel's memo addresses just one fiscal year, and yet it is indicative of a long term, systemic challenge facing our military. This in turn will require a long term, strategic solution: how to effectively provide for and maintain a fighting force in a world of both budgetary constraints and constant threats against our homeland. Congress and the President were elected to make tough decisions - not to stand idly by as the foundation of our nation's military is compromised.

At the same time, it is important to remember that at the heart of this issue are dedicated Americans who sacrifice for this nation. These include young Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen whose training and resources are being undermined by sequestration; civilian DOD employees who support those individuals but are being forced to sit at home under furlough; and the children of those furloughed federal employees who will feel the brunt of sequestration as their parents find fewer dollars in their paychecks. They are all patriotic Americans who have dedicated their lives to this country so that it will remain the greatest nation the world has ever known. Instead of balancing the budget on their backs, let's prove to them that we've got their backs - because they've had ours since 1776. I have sounded the alarm on this issue for almost two years now, and I will continue to urge Congress and the White House to find a solution. It's time to make the tough decisions.

Finally, I am pleased to share great news for Virginia and the Chesapeake Bay. The House passed my Chesapeake Bay Accountability and Recovery Act (H.R. 739) last week as part of the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act (H.R. 2642). The Bay is an economic engine and a cultural beacon for our region, and many industries and citizens have a vested interest in a clean Bay. My bill would enhance coordination, flexibility and efficiency of restoration efforts. This was a great achievement for Virginia and America's First District, and I am eager for the Senate to pass Senator Warner's companion legislation and see this bill become law. As Co-Chair of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Caucus, I will continue to advocate for and support measures to restore and preserve this national treasure.